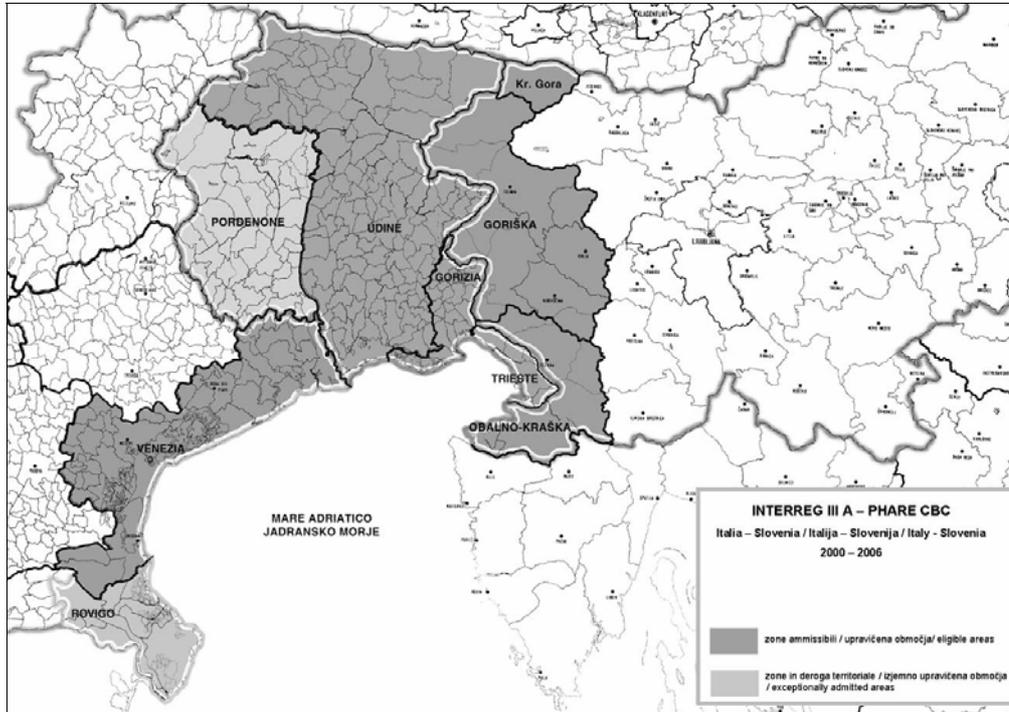


**EUROREG**  
**Case study report**

**Regions, minorities and European integration: A case study on the Italo-Slovene border.**

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## 1. Introduction

This study investigates the effects of European integration on the Slovenian ethnic minority's and the Italian national majority's mobilization in the area of the Italo-Slovene border. It also addresses the changing interests and identities of the Slovenophone community living in Friuli Venezia Giulia (FVG), placing them within the wider undergoing redefinition of the regional context.

Since the 1990s, the whole border area of Friuli Venezia Giulia has undergone a number of changes which have led to a complex process of regional redefinition. This report investigates some of the major changes, by distinguishing three levels of analysis: a regional level within the specific context of border transformations; an internal level, that is the domestic political factors which have directly affected the Slovenophone minority's condition; a broader European level, that is EU's integration and enlargement process, cross-border cooperation policies and their impact on the regional context and on the majority/minority relations.

With regard to the third level of analysis, the report focuses on the role played by Europe in enhancing the regional integration of the border area between FVG and Slovenia by means of a succession of investments (which have been taking place since the early 1990s) in cross-border cooperation and in the promotion of local development. In spite of the fact that Interreg programs do not directly target minorities, the 232 km-long programming border area connects 13 Slovenian municipalities with 24 Italian towns, among which all areas of FVG inhabited by Slovenophones are included. It is for this reason that, among the many schemes of cross border cooperation policies implemented by the EU, Interreg funds represent an interesting case study to evaluate changes of minority's interests, opportunities and constraints which have occurred since the 1990s.

The Slovenophone community in FVG is a significantly heterogeneous minority in terms of historical background, patterns of identity and integration within the region/nation state. It is also considerably dispersed throughout the border area. Both factors have influenced significantly majority/minority relations in the region and have not been ignored in the study.

In certain areas of FVG, the existence of micro-communities ethnically and linguistically homogeneous questions the identification of majority/minority relations as defined by ethnic, national and linguistic belonging and results in far more complex picture. For example, in the area of the Natisone's valley (a part of the so called *Slavia Friulana* in the province of Udine), definitions of majority/minority relations, according to which the Slovenophone community would be regarded as the 'minority', are indeed questionable: while the identification of the 'minority' according to the spoken mother tongue would lead to a definition of the whole community as a Slovenophone minority community, this self-perception is, in fact, highly disputed among Slovenophones themselves. In other areas, such as in the Carso's villages (in the province of Trieste) inhabited by a majority of Slovenians, interviewees' perceptions identify the Italians living in the area as the minority community; while majority/minority relations are perceived in more traditional terms whenever a broader territory is taken into account. Moreover, the territorial characteristics of certain rural and mountain areas inhabited by the Slovenophones, areas where majority/minority relations are defined along the lines of the rural/urban cleavage rather than ethnic/national belonging, seem also to influence the community's identity and self-perception of some sectors of the Slovenian minority. This is the case of the Collio area in the province of Gorizia. Finally, the internal political divisions within the Slovenophone community living in FVG overlap with some of the distinctions mentioned above, influencing actors' identity perceptions, as well as political, socio-economic and cultural demands.

This complex pattern of situations needs to be taken into account when assessing the impact of EU's enlargement and of EU structural policies on minority's and majority's mobilization and perceptions, as well as on the redefinition of the regional interests. The research has focused on the following aspects: the socio-economic situation of the Slovenophone community living in FVG within the context of the regional and territorial development; the Slovenophone community's political representation, mobilization and participation in the public life; its identity representations, cultural recognition and perceptions of 'Europe'. The analysis of the above factors was aimed at assessing whether and the extent to which EU's enlargement and structural policies have reinforced significant changes occurring since the 1990s within the community and in majority/minority relations. As we will argue, on the one side these changes should be placed within a broader international and political context in order to be fully understood; on the other side, as we will see, the EU's integration policies have improved minority's opportunities and have influenced majority/minority relations further enhancing a mobilization process which had already been undertaken by the Slovenophone minority itself. In other words, although EU's integration and cross border cooperation policies should not be regarded as a determinant factor for minority's mobilization, they have had a positive impact in providing new opportunities that could be exploited by the Slovenophones thanks to the fact that a mobilization process of the minority community had already started during the previous decades.

As far as the sources and the methodology are concerned, the research has been conducted through a series of in-depth interviews with selected members of socio/economic categories which include both minority's and majority's representatives. As listed in the appendix, 26 interviews out of 33 were conducted with minority's representatives (politicians, community's leaders, civil society and think tank representatives, members of business categories, development officials and main project beneficiaries); the remaining interviews were conducted with majority's representatives (politicians, members of business categories and development officials). Moreover, a series of data, relevant information and documents have been collected to integrate and crosscheck actors' perceptions. Together with data obtained from official sources, other sources include material such as books and informative booklets produced in the area of extra-academic research. The latter have been crucial to understand some peculiar aspects of the Slovenian community living in FVG and to assess their cultural needs and socio-economic practices.

The in-depth interviews conducted during the fieldwork have been extremely important to assess actors' perceptions but also to collect information about changes within the domestic and the regional context during the 1970s, the 1980s and the 1990s. Changing opportunities and constraints for the minority are the result of medium term processes which can be only partially documented through official sources. This is mainly due to the ever-shifting and changing condition of the Slovenophone minority itself but also to the criteria according to which data are collected (i.e. they relate to the whole area and the whole population of FVG with no distinction between minorities and majority). Due to the lack of statistical data on the socio-economic condition and on the political representation of the Slovenophones living in FVG, a comprehensive analysis of the effects of European integration at the Italo-Slovene border could be achieved only if integrated with other sources. Information gathered from minority's and majority's representatives during the interviews has been crosschecked with different respondents and, when possible, it has been backed by additional documentation.

The case-study report is divided in six sections (including the introduction) and ends with some conclusive remarks. The second section provides the reader with some background of the case study. It describes the size and the distribution of the Slovenophones in FVG and assesses majority/minority relations in an historical perspective, in the political

and institutional context and in the context of the regional socio-economic development. The third section deals with key factors of change at the regional level (in the specific context of the Italo-Slovene border's transformation), at the internal level (in the context of regional and national policies) and at the broader level of European integration. The fourth section investigates the extent to which major changes, which have occurred since the 1990s, have affected opportunities and constraints for the Slovenophones in FVG and majority/minority relations. In particular, it focuses on the Slovenophones' socio-economic condition, political representation, cultural mobilization and needs and on the impact of European integration policies. The fifth section assesses the impact of the set of factors mentioned above through local actors' perceptions and responses. The final section summarizes the main findings described throughout the report and provides some conclusive remarks on the Slovenophone minority's changing interests and majority/minority relations within the reconfiguration of the regional context and the European integration process.

The analysis developed throughout the whole report argues that the high heterogeneity of the Slovenophone minority in FVG has led to different patterns of mobilization and to a dynamic process to social and identity construction and self-perception. As a result, as the research findings show, the effects of European integration on ethnic minority's mobilization and majority/minority relations vary considerably according to the different local situations, as well to the political preferences and to the inter-generational composition of the community's members.

## 2. Background of the case

### 2.1. Contested numbers: the presence and the distribution of the Slovenophones in FVG

According to the Italian Ministry of the Interior, in 1996 there were an estimated 61,000 Slovenophones resident in Friuli-Venezia Giulia. As it is shown in table 1 (which only refers to the 1990s), this number is highly disputed by scholars and Slovenia herself.<sup>1</sup> The absence of a definitive figure is due to a number of factors, such as the disputed criteria used to count the community's members and the reluctance of Slovenophones themselves in being counted: as many Slovenophone interviewees put it, the importance of minority's issues should not depend on the number of minority's members. Not surprisingly, the figures provided by Italian sources (both at the national/government level and at the regional one) tend to play down the Slovenophone presence, while the Slovenophone sources insist on a far bigger population.

The Slovenophone population living in FVG is not a homogeneous community. The historical background, the socio economic situation and the territorial characteristics of the border zones inhabited by the Slovenophones deeply differ from one area to the other. These differences highly influence actors' identity perceptions and their social, cultural and political claims.

Table 1. *Estimate number of Slovenophones resident in FVG*

Source	Province of Trieste	Province of Gorizia	Province of Udine	Total
Min. Interior (1996)	25.000	11.000	25.000	61.000
Bellinello (1996)	29.119	8.427	9.336	46.882
Stranj (1992)	49.000	18.000	29.000	96.000

<sup>1</sup> The Republic of Slovenia estimates that there are 100,000 Slovenophones in FVG.

Though they are present within 36 communities in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the Slovenophones of the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia have been the longest and best protected. This is due to the fact that, unlike the province of Udine, they were subject to the post-war negotiations over the Free Territory of Trieste. These negotiations – which ended only in 1975 after the signature of the Osimo Treaty– resulted in Italy committing itself to minority protection in the area concerned, and the provision of a number of rights to Slovenophones, which included education in the Slovene language at the nursery, primary and lower- and upper-secondary levels, the right to address the local and provincial public administration in Slovene, bilingual identity cards, and bilingual toponymical signs in their communities (though the latter has been being implemented at a painfully slow rate). The Italian Parliament finally ratified the Osimo-era legislation on the protection of its Slovenophone minority only in February 2001—with a delay of three decades. This delay was due both to the resistance posed by some Italian right-wing politicians representing some municipalities in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, and, primarily, the disagreement existing on which geographical area minority protection should be applied within the province of Udine (where the Slovenophone community, which has resided within Italy’s borders since 1866, is scattered across dozens of mainly sparsely-populated municipalities). Italian Law 38 of 2001 officially recognised the Slovenophone community in 32 communities in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, and among them in several municipalities in the province of Udine, thus in principle making the latter equal in terms of rights with those resident of the provinces of Gorizia and Trieste for the first time.<sup>2</sup> Previously, the Slovenophones of Udine had no clearly defined linguistic rights, and their belonging to an abstract slovenophone dimension was denied by almost a century of forced Italian nationalization. Law 38 will, however only apply to those municipalities of the province which specifically request it. As such, state funds destined for its fulfillment remain at present unassigned and/or unavailable in several municipalities.

If one adopts broad classification criteria which mainly refer to the historical background and to the characteristics of the territories inhabited by the Slovenophones, as well as to a more general distinction between the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia, on the one side, and the Province of Udine (*Slavia Friulana*) on the other side, the Slovenian community can be divided in the following groups:

- The *Slavia Friulana* in the Province of Udine (see map below, municipalities from 1 to 21) is mainly a mountain area distributed in three valleys: the Natisone valley, the Resia valley and the Canale valley. The Natisone valley and the Resia valley (*Slavia Veneta*; municipalities from 4 to 21) are inhabited by a high majority of homogeneous population who speak a Slovenian dialect.
- The Collio area in the Province of Gorizia (see map I, municipalities from 22 to 29): a rural/mountain area which include at least 3 municipalities inhabited by a majority of Slovenophones.
- The Carso area in the Province of Trieste (see map I, municipalities from 30 to 35) which is inhabited by a majority of Slovenophones. A large portion of Carso is included in the administrative municipality of Trieste.
- The urban agglomerates of Trieste and Gorizia. In the urban agglomerate of Trieste there is an estimated 10 % of Slovenophone population. In the urban agglomerate of Gorizia there is an estimated 12% of Slovenophone population.

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<sup>2</sup> Bratina notes that there were 17 *comuni* (municipalities) in Friuli-Venezia Giulia with Slovenophone majorities in 1997, namely: Dolina (formerly San Dorligo della Valle-Dolina), Monrupino-Repentabor, Sgonico-Zgonik, Duino-Aurisina-Devin-Nabrežina (all province of Trieste); Doberdò del Lago-Doberdob, Savogna d’Isonzo-Sovodnje ob Soči, San Floriano del Collio-Števerjan (all province of Gorizia); and, San Pietro al Natisone, San Leonardo, Stregna, Drenchia, Grimacco, Savogna, Pulfero, Taipana, Lusevera, and Resia (all province of Udine) (Bratina 1997:131fn)



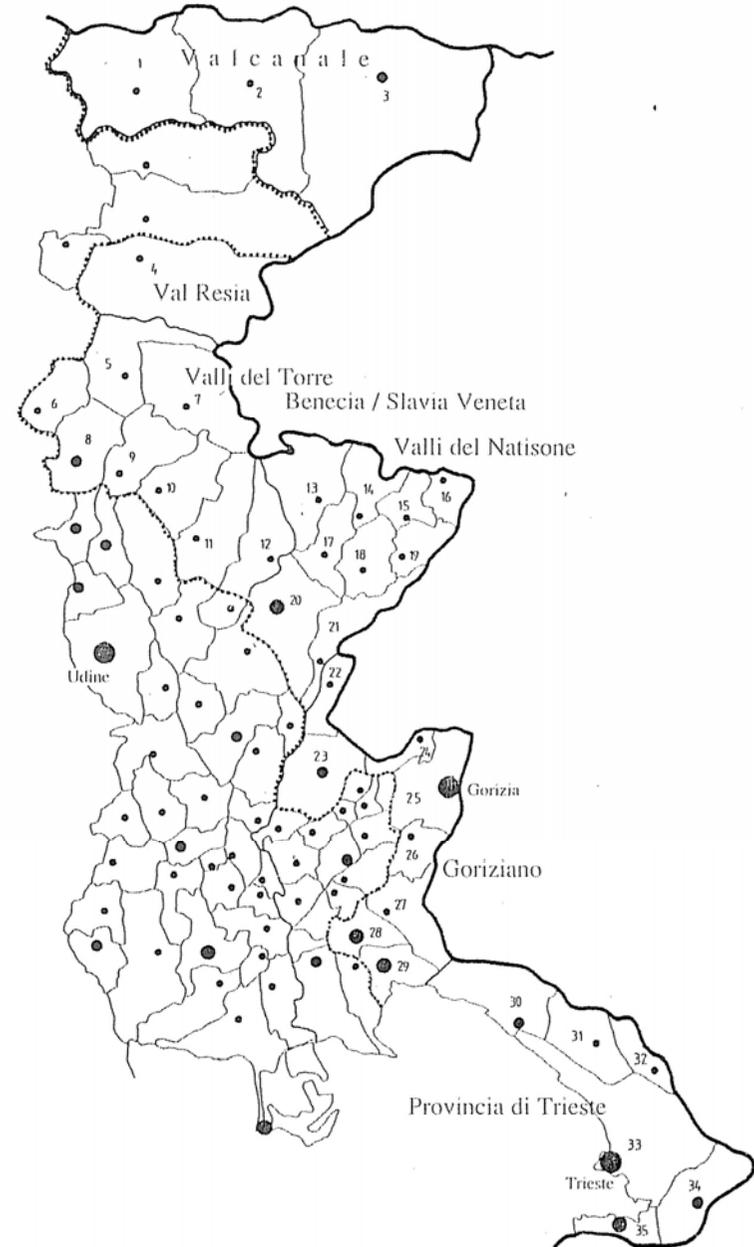
- 1 Provincia di Pordenone
- 2 Provincia di Udine
- 3 Provincia di Gorizia
- 4 Provincia di Trieste

**Legenda:**

- Confine politico
- Confine provinciale
- Area di insediamento storico degli sloveni
- Confine comunale
- Centri urbani maggiori
- Centri urbani intermedi
- Centri urbani minori
- Centri comunali

**ELENCO DEI COMUNI IN CUI LA  
POPOLAZIONE SLOVENA  
È STORICAMENTE PRESENTE**

- 1 Pontebba / Tablja
- 2 Malborghetta - Valbruna / Naborjet - Ovcja vas
- 3 Tarvisio / Trbiž
- 4 Resia / Rezija
- 5 Lusevera / Bar do
- 6 Montenaro / Gorjani
- 7 Taipana / Tipana
- 8 Tarcento / Centa
- 9 Nimis / Neme
- 10 Altimis / Ahlen
- 11 Faedis / Fojda
- 12 Torreano / Tavorjana
- 13 Pulfero / Padbosesec
- 14 Savogna / Savodnje
- 15 Grimacco / Grmek
- 16 Drenchia / Dreka
- 17 S. Pietro al Natisone / Špeter
- 18 S. Leonardo / Sv. Lenart
- 19 Sregna / Srednje
- 20 Cividale del Friuli / Cedad
- 21 Prepotto / Prapatno
- 22 Dolegna del Collio / Dolenje
- 23 Cormons / Krmin
- 24 S. Floriano del Collio / Števerjan
- 25 Gorizia / Gorica
- 26 Savogna d' Isonzo / Savodnje
- 27 Doberdo del Lago / Doberdob
- 28 Ronchi dei Legionari / Ronke
- 29 Monfalcone / Tržič
- 30 Duino - Aurisina / Devin - Nabrežina
- 31 Sgonico / Zgonik
- 32 Monrupino / Repentabor
- 33 Trieste / Trst
- 34 S. Dorligo della Valle / Dolina
- 35 Muggia / Milje



## 2.2. Majority/minority relations in the historical context

As it has been underlined in the State of Art report (Faro 2005), the historical background of the region has played a crucial role in shaping majority/minority relations at the Italo-Slovene border. The Italo-Slovene frontier—which, from its origin at the two nations' mutual border with Austria, describes what many have deemed the meeting-point of Europe's three great, historic civilisations and ethno-linguistic groups, the Romance, Germanic, and Slavonic—has also been one of European history's most violently fraught, famously so in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, the degeneration of that frontier at the end of the Second World War into a genocide area was not due to the region's historic and enduring multicultural composition, but rather the impossibility of dividing it along ethnic lines (Gross 1978). Competing, 'self-completing' nationalist projects in Italy and the emergent Yugoslavia had incited both to fight against the Habsburgs for the liberation of their ethnic brethren in the frontier in World War One, and thus to lay simultaneous claim thereafter to a frontier which had been and multilingual and multicultural since the 6<sup>th</sup> century AD. The addition of an ideological struggle for this frontier—which had been incorporated into Italy after the First World War—fought largely along nationalist lines served to exacerbate the enduring conflict over which nation the frontier 'belonged to' as the Second World War ended. It is the memory of Italian fascism's brutal oppression of the region's Slovenes and Croats, and the 'retribution' for it which came in the deportation, execution, and exodus of the bulk of the Istrian Italoophone population, which continues to fuel contemporary skepticism of the 'other' community between the majority Italoophone and minority Slovenophone populations on the Italian side of the border.

Beginning in the latter half of the 1950s, political relations between Italy and Yugoslavia began to normalize—though mutual minority protection, per se, was never the stated or decisive factor for doing so (Bratina 1997:130)—leading to the beginnings of regional and borderland economic re-integration. Citizens of both nations began to cross the local border to visit relatives and on errands—Slovenes to shop for household goods unavailable in Yugoslavia and Italians to purchase cheaper petrol—with increasing frequency following the signing of bilateral agreements on the movement of borderland residents in 1955. Indeed, Slovenia's burgeoning economic success relative to the other republics of Yugoslavia provided ever-increasing opportunities for heightened economic relations with Italy. At the same time, relations between the Slovenophone minority in Italy with Slovenia (within Yugoslavia) began to normalize, and, in some ways, 'institutionalise' through economic and cultural support mechanisms (Bratina 1997:130). The era saw the formation of the first, post-war Slovene community association in Italy, the *Slovensko kulturno gospodarska zveza* (SKGZ, 'Slovene cultural-economic union'), which maintained ties with the Slovenian socialist party, and, in the 1970s, Italy's first Slovene political party, the Catholic/Liberal *Slovenska skupnost* (SSk, 'Slovene Union') (Bratina 1997:130).

The degeneration of the Italo-sloveno frontier during WWII into a genocide area is still perceived as a main factor of identification and as a shared common memory by the whole Slovenophone community living in FVG. Nevertheless, the fact that the area inhabited by Slovenophones in the province of Udine (which is also known as the '*Slavia Friulana*') has been part of Italian Kingdom since 1886 has deeply influenced and differentiated the nationalization process which has been undergone by the minority (Naz 1996; Marinig 2004). This nationalization process was particularly harsh during the fascism regime which had always denied and violently repressed the Slovenophone identity's claims in the *Slavia Friulana*. Moreover, after WWII, the expectations raised by the end of the fascist regime have not been fulfilled, as the conditions of the Slovenophones living in the area have been destabilized by the political context of the Cold War and exacerbated by their depiction as a pro-communist and pro-Slav population. As a matter of fact, in the *Slavia Friulana*, the

Slavophone identity has been mostly reclaimed in political terms as an anti-nationalistic and anti-fascist identity. This has led to a ‘from outside’ identification of the community as a pro-communists community and instrumentally justified a forced nationalization process with the pretext of the ‘communism fear’.

The education system and the catholic liturgy have been two of the main instruments through which forced nationalization have been imposed after WWII. While Masses celebrated in Slovenian language had been prohibited already during the fascist regime, from 1947/48 onward, the Italian Ministry of education issued several orders aimed at transferring Slovophones teachers from the Italo-Yugoslav border to other areas of Italy (Marinig 2004). In contrast, the Slovenian community living in the areas of Trieste and Gorizia was officially recognized by the minority protection agreement that Italy signed with Yugoslavia and Austria after WWII and by the London Memorandum of 1954 (which also provided for the maintenance of Slovenian schools and the creation of a the bank directly managed by the Slovenophone minority – *Creditni*).

This different historical legacy has also led to a different mobilization process of the Slovenophone community in FVG. Starting from the 1950s, in the province of Trieste and Gorizia relations between the Slovenophone minority with both Italian institutions and Yugoslavia had developed a certain degree of ‘institutionalisation’ through political parties and civil society’s organization. In contrast, in the *Slavia Friulana*, the process of identity’s reclaiming begun only during the 1970 and it has been a far-less institutionalized one. Some of the interviewees have not hesitated in defining the mobilization process of the Slovenian community in the Natisone valley as a ‘social movement’ (Respondent 11 and 13), reclaiming that «social changes have been induced by community’s struggles rather than by external factors» (R. 13).

For example, in the Natisone valley forms of transborder cooperation with Yugoslavia have been implemented by members and groups of the community, both in economic and cultural matters. A group of feminist activists (*Donne della Benecia*) started to write and represent theatre comedies in Slovenian as a form of identity reclaim, involving in the performances also women from the Slovenian villages of the Yugoslav side of the border. Moreover, the aim of reappointing the Slovenian language was reclaimed in political terms also by groups of young Slovenophones who during the 1970s begun to be set up choruses singing traditional Yugoslav and Slovenian songs. As a matter of fact, while in Trieste and Gorizia provinces the Slavophone community has always spoken a current Slovenian language, in the *Slavia Friulana* the vernacular idiom was an oral dialect which differed to some extent with the official Slovenian. Due to the nationalization process the language of the area could not develop over the last 100 years. In the post WWII period, in the *Slavia Friulana* the right to be recognised as a minority could also be denied because a large part of the population was illiterate. Italian policies of assimilation were based on the false representation of the “*italianissimi*” in order to deny any cultural heritage. In other words they were considered trivial Italians who where illiterate and, therefore, without any cultural belonging.

Some of these mobilisation processes have resulted in significant achievements such as the bilingual school<sup>3</sup> of San Pietro al Natisone and the setting up of the industrial area in San Pietro al Natisone (Sussi 2002; Marinig 2004). Within the latter three factories (Kronos, Vepelas and Hobles) were set up by Italian-Yugoslav investments: 50% of shares were held by private Italian businessmen and the other 50% were held by a Yugoslav public corporation (Petricig 2000). Claiming that this was «the first experiment of its kind in the western world», one of the interviewee defined them as «mixed-investment corporations funded by both the communist and capitalist system» (R 10). The mobilization process in the

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<sup>3</sup> For further details on the Bilingual school of San Pietro al Natisone see section 4.3

*Slavia Friulana* was also induced by a natural event. In 1976 a strong earthquake hit FVG with disastrous consequences in the area of the Natisone valley. A consistent aid for facing the emergency and the reconstruction of the area was provided by the Yugoslav federation. This facilitated subsequent relations between local Italian and Yugoslav border communities and improved the images of Yugoslavia itself in the eyes of diffident members of the Italian majority (Petricig 2000).

With reference to the common historical background of the Slovenian community in FVG, it is important to underline a shared attitude among Slovenophones in refusing a “dual-nationalistic” approach to the history of the eastern border of Italy. Acknowledging that the eastern border of FVG has always been a transnational zone, some interviewees denounced the revisionist tendency to rewrite the history of the area in national terms which has also been fueled by Slovenia’s independence (R. 1, 10 and 14). The recrudescence of the debate about the *foibe* and the properties’ restitution (see Faro 2004) being only the main example of mainstream historiography approach. Besides actors’ perceptions, the extreme importance of different approaches to the historical legacy of the area is witnessed by the number of research which during the last years have been conducted on subjects often overshadowed by mainstream literature: such as the Friulian concentration camps where mostly Slovenian have been confined from 1941 to 1943; and the anti-communists and anti-Slav activity of parallel Italian secret services in the area after WWII (Naz 1996). Many of these studies have been conducted by Slovenian researchers themselves or have been funded by Slovenian cultural associations rather than by academic institutions.

### 2.3. Majority/minority relations in the political and institutional context

Due to its unique ethno-linguistic composition and the frontier-related political *problématique* it faced, Friuli-Venezia Giulia was granted its own regional parliament and autonomous status within the Italian republic in 1964.<sup>4</sup> The Triestine historian Elio Apih notes that, by the mid-1960s, ‘greater and more equitable Slovene participation in civic life stabilized, even if the effects were limited and transitory, and one can say that this fact, together with the institution of the [autonomous] region, signaled the definitive exit of [majority] Triestine political life from the period of post-fascism,’ (Apih 1988:189). From WWII to nowadays, the Slovenian community in FVG has been represented in the local institutions at municipal and regional level.

The history of the political representation of the Slovenians in FVG has always been linked to the history of Italian political parties, as the majority of the community is not politically represented by SSK (the only ethnic-Slovenian party in Italy) but by Slovophones politicians who have chosen to be members of left-wing Italians parties (Sussi 2002). Since WWII the Slovenophones living in FVG have been divided into two main political factions. On the one side, those who refer to the catholic/liberal SSK and, up to the 1990s, to its traditional alliance with the Italian Christian Democrats (DC); on the other side, those who have chosen to be represented, up to the 90s, through the Italian Communist Party or the Socialist Party (PCI and PSI) and, after the post-communist transition of the PCI, through the left-Democratic Party (PDS) which changed its name into left-Democrats (DS), or through other parties such as the Party of the Italian Communist (PDCI), the re-founded communist party *Rifondazione Comunista* (PRC) and the Green Party (Verdi). Although political divisions are nowadays less sharp than in the past, the two factions still label each others as the ‘whites’ and the ‘reds’. Nevertheless, a shared anti-fascist position and

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<sup>4</sup> Friuli-Venezia Giulia joined four other Italian regions (Sicily, Sardinia, Valle d’Aosta/Vallée d’Aoste, and Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol) which had previously been granted autonomy for similar reasons.

skepticism toward political alliance with right-wing parties has to be acknowledged as an element which unifies the political identity of the Slovenophone community as a whole.

From WWII up to the 1990s, the SSK representing the 'white' Slovenophones in FVG had been allied with the ruling Christian Democrats both at the national and at the regional level, while 'red' Slovenophones belonged to opposition parties (with the only exception of the so called *pentapartito* phase in the 1980s during which the Socialist party was part of the Italian ruling coalition). As a consequence of the Italian political system's transition during the 1990s and of the raising of the 'Berlusconi era', 'white' and 'red' Slovenians share nowadays the same side of the Italian political arena, as they all refer to parties of the centre-left coalition. In fact, also SSK is nowadays supporting the centre-left coalition as it is a political ally of the Margherita (one of the parties arose from the split of the Christian Democrats). This is one of the reasons why many among the Italian majority still label the whole Slovenian community as a politically 'leftist' community.

The fact that SSK has never represented the majority of the Slovenophones living in FVG, was confirmed also by one of its long-lasting leader (and present president) during an interview (R. 9). SSK reached its peak in 1968 when it got 11.000 votes in the election of the regional parliament of FVG. While SSK has always maintained one representative in the regional parliament, other Slovenophone representatives have been constantly elected for other left-wing parties since the post WWII period. Currently in the regional parliament of FVG there are 7 Slovenophone representatives (1 for SSK and 6 for left-wing parties such as DS, PRC, PDCI and Verdi). Moreover, starting from the post WWII period up to nowadays, a Slovenophone politician has always been elected in the Italian Parliament: for the Communist party up to the 1990s, and for PDS and DS, from the 1990s onwards (currently the Slovenophone representative in the Italian Parliament is Milos Budin elected for the DS). Despite internal political divisions, a phenomenon of "voting shifting" from the SSK to the Slovenophone candidate of the left-wing Italian parties has always been acknowledged at the national elections. As a matter of fact, the SSK is a minoritarian party in the context of the political life of the Slovenophone minority at the regional level, and it has never been able to candidate one of its members to the national Parliament. SSK's strength has been declining as a consequence of the transformations undergone by the Italian political party system during the 1990s and of the dismantling of the Iron Curtain. Within the context of the Cold War, SSK long capitalized on the pro-Yugoslav attitude of the 'red' Slovenophone faction. Nowadays party's agenda and identity can be formulated and shaped along 'ethnic-lines' only. That said, it is important to remember that the SSK does not represent the whole Slovenophone community in FVG, but only a minoritarian side of its complex political reality. Therefore the decreasing of its political strength is not symptomatic of a decreasing representation of the Slovenophone minority's interests.

As a consequence of the political support of the left-wing Italian parties, the political representation of the Slovenian community has always been secured also at the national level. Thanks to a proposal of Bratina (a Slovenophone member of the Italian Parliament elected twice within the PCI ranks during the 1980s) the electoral districts of FVG were redrawn as to include in one of them the majority of the Slovenian community living in the area. Electoral data show that in the electoral district of 'Friuli orientale' (where the majority of the Slovenian community lives) the left-wing coalition is stronger than in other electoral districts of FVG. The Italian electoral districts have recently been changed by a law approved by the centre-right coalition which was first operative in the April 2006 elections. The Slovenophone candidate for the DS Milos Budin was elected again at the Senate.

Besides regional and national level, Slovenophone representatives hold several positions as mayors or councilors in municipalities where the Slovenian community is the majority of the population. Most of the Slovenophone towns are run by centre/left coalitions. These tendencies have recently been redirected if compared to the past. For example, the two

municipalities of Duino-Aurisina and San Pietro al Natisone are currently and for the first time ever run by a center-right coalition. Moreover, with regard to the political participation of the Slovenian community in the public life, it is important to underline the role played by traditional organizations of the civil society such as the SKGZ (traditionally linked to Yugoslavia and to the PCI and the PSI) and the SSO (traditionally linked to the SSk).

The differences, underlined above, existing in historical terms between the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia and the province of Udine have also affected the political representation of the Slovenian community in FVG. In the *Slavia Friulana*, SSk has never been successful. This situation must be interpreted in the light of the Italian post-war political climate up to the 1990s and in the light of the Cold-war context. As the SSk was allied to the Italian Christian Democrats (DC) and the DC was a traditionally anti-communist party, the Slovenophones politically active in the *Slavia Friulana* long mistrusted SSk and the DC's local politicians. Recent historical research has confirmed the involvement of local Christian Democrats politicians in the anti-communists and anti-Slav activities of the parallel Italian secret service (known as *Gladio*) in the area of the *Slavia Friulana* (Naz, 1996).

This oppressive political climate began to change in the mid 1970s with the so-called 'season of the *Liste civiche*' ('civic lists') (Petricig 2000). In order to avoid the political polarization of the Italian traditional parties, list of candidates of both Slovenophones and Italophones gathering together on the basis of local needs and demands were presented at the municipal elections. For example, in the municipality of San Pietro al Natisone (the most important municipality in the area) a left-wing 'civic list' won the election for the first time in 1980 and it run the town uninterruptedly until 2004 when another 'civic list', supported by a right-wing coalition, won the elections. In the early 1980s, the phenomenon of the 'civic lists' expanded with a domino effect to other municipalities of the *Slavia Friulana*.

The 'civic lists' have represented an important turning point in the political life of the area, as identity issues have become central in the local political arena. As already mentioned, identity claims such as the public use of the Slovenian language had previously been opposed by the Christian democrats ruling politicians with the pretext of the 'anti-communist fear'. The civic lists were composed by independent candidates who could not be directly linked to the Communist party, and this facilitated their possibility of gaining the power at the local level. As testified by some respondents who participated this political transition (R. 10, 11 and 13), the public use of the Slovenian language and the reclaiming of identity rights have been some of the key political demands promoted and upheld by the civic lists. These claims have been formally recognized only with the approval of the legislation protecting the Slovenophone minority in 2001.

### 2.3. Majority/minority relations in the context of the territorial socio-economic development

With regard to the territorial socio-economic development, it is important to underline that FVG is a heterogeneous region characterized by highly economically differentiated areas. As it is shown in *Table 2*, industries are mainly concentrated in the Provinces of Pordenone and Udine, while in the provinces of Gorizia and Trieste the largest share of the workforce is concentrated in the tertiary sector.

*Table 2. Economic activities and number of employed in FVG -1996 census*

Productive sectors	Gorizia		Udine		Pordenone		Trieste		FVG	
	Firms	employed	Firms	employed	Firms	employed	Firms	employed	Firms	employed
Manufactories	981	9493	5917	52381	3377	49529	1261	20023	11536	131426
Building	863	2769	5071	15090	2063	7310	1237	4095	12381	17190

constructions										
Services	6247	17884	23902	67372	11973	33569	10875	44558	52997	163383

There are not specific data regarding the economic situation of the Slovenophone in FVG. However, one aspect that needs underlining is that most of the areas inhabited by the Slovenian community are rural or mountain areas. As a matter of fact, the socio economic situation of the Slovenophone community in FVG seems to be linked more to the different territorial conditions of the areas inhabited by Slovenians than to majority/minority relations understood in ethnic-national terms. With the exception of the two urban agglomerates of Trieste and Gorizia, Slovenophones are concentrated in the area of Carso (a rural area in the Province of Trieste), in the area of Collio (a rural/mountain area in the Province of Gorizia) and in the area of the *Slavia Friulana* (a mountain area in the Province of Udine). These three areas are not industrialized, and therefore the economic activities of Slovenophones living in the areas are mainly linked to the agricultural sector or to the eco-tourist sector. With regard to the cities of Trieste and Gorizia, and consistently with the general trend underlined in table 2 for the whole population of FVG, the majority of Slovenophones living in urban agglomerates are employed in the services sector or run small business activities.

As witnessed by actors' responses, the socio-economic situation of Slovenophones living in FVG is not disadvantaged in comparison to the one of Italophones. On the contrary, with regard to the service sectors and small business activities, they have always perceived bilingual competences and long-lasting trans-border relations as advantages in exploiting the border economy. With regard to the agricultural sector, a number of disadvantages, such as the lack of infrastructures, are perceived as linked to the territorial conditions and the rural/urban dichotomy rather than as the result of direct forms of discrimination against the minority (R. 12, 18, 19 and 24). Even if there are not quantitative data supporting these perceptions, actors' responses are confirmed by ethnographic research (Sussi 2002). Moreover, especially in the provinces of Gorizia and Trieste, Slovenophones have benefited from the support of well organized socio-economic organizations (such as the SKGZ) which used to be financially supported also by the former Yugoslavia.

All the three provinces inhabited by Slovenophones experienced a slight population decline in the 1990s, with Trieste's suffering from the most dramatic decline at -4.9%; Trieste has also the highest old-age index among the provinces involved, as well as in Italy overall, at 225.9% (Faro 2005). Between 1995 and 1998, the workforce resident in the provinces of Trieste and Udine decreased slightly, whilst it grew in the others (Faro 2005). The unemployment rate, meanwhile, decreased by 1.5% in the overall area, with most gains in the provinces of Udine and Gorizia; the highest regional unemployment rate was recorded in the Slovenian littoral, at 11.2% in 1998.<sup>5</sup> The tertiary sector is the predominant source of employment in the region. The Italian provinces maintain per-capita GDP at among the highest levels in Italy, while the Slovenian regions have levels of gross added value per inhabitant on roughly the national.<sup>6</sup> Entrepreneurship remains higher in the Italian regions, with roughly 25% of the working population self-employed, whereas in Slovenia the self-employed comprise only about 12% of the working population—though this is in large part due to the fact that Slovenia has only had a full market economy since 1989 (Faro 2005).

There are an estimated 5,000-7,000 Slovenian 'daily migrants' working on the Italian side of the border, many of whom work in Trieste, attracted by better wages in Italy (or conversely attractive to the Italians due to their lower wages) as well as by the availability of

<sup>5</sup> The Interreg IIIA Italy-Slovenia Joint Programming Document estimates the unemployment rate in the province of Trieste at roughly 9%, versus roughly 5% in the provinces of Gorizia and Udine.

<sup>6</sup> GDP is not yet factored on a regional level in Slovenia.

household and care posts in this increasingly elderly city.<sup>7</sup> Given the delay in the application of the free-movement-of-persons principle imposed by the EU upon Slovenia, only borderland Slovenes are presently allowed to work in Italy without special permits, cross-border labour movement for borderlanders having been bilaterally agreed in 1955.<sup>8</sup> A 1999 survey conducted by Friuli-Venezia Giulia among a total of 2,400 residents of its region, Carinthia, and the Slovene borderland revealed that only 3% of Italians and 7% of Slovenes surveyed crossed the border for work (though, given that much day-migrant labour is ‘untaxed’, the actual number may be higher).

TABLE 3

<i>Frequency of border crossing</i>	% of Italians	% of Slovenes
Several times a week	2.1	10.3
Weekly	5.9	7.9
Several times a month	9.5	19.3
Monthly	8.7	16.0
Several times a year	27.6	21.1
Rarely	22.7	16.2
Never	23.5	9.2

TABLE 4

<i>Reason for border crossing</i>	% of Italians	% of Slovenes
For holidays	79.6	24.1
For shopping	22.3	86.9
To purchase petrol	26.8	0.3
For work	3.1	7.2
To visit friends/relatives	7.6	19.2

### 3. European integration and the domestic-regional context of change

Approximately since 1991 (when the Slovenian Republic secession from the Yugoslav federation was firstly recognised by Germany), the whole border area of the Friuli Venezia Giulia (namely, the three provinces of Udine, Trieste and Gorizia where the Slovene-speaking minority is territorially concentrated) has been invested by a sequence of radical changes. The complex process of regional

redefinition can be analytically described distinguishing three different – though deeply interrelated – levels of changes:

- a regional level, in the specific context of border transformations;
- an internal level, concerning the domestic political factors which directly involved the Slovenophone minority condition;
- a broader European level, concerning the EU’s integration and enlargement process and cross-border cooperation policies and their impact on the regional context and on the majority/minority relations.

Linked together, those three interrelated levels could suggest a rather linear path toward an increasing integration process. The main changing factors of this process are: the gradual

<sup>7</sup> Figures from *Il Piccolo*, 28 August 2004, and an interview with a Slovenian specialist on labour movement, 25 April 2002. As many of these workers are unregistered, it is not possible to provide a more precise figure; there are no official statistics nor is there any official monitoring.

<sup>8</sup> The Udine/Videm agreement on local cross-border traffic between Italy and Yugoslavia in 1955 created four-month permits which allowed the roughly 690,000 residents living within 10km of the border four crossings per month, each for a maximum of 24 hours. The terms of the bilateral agreement were recast in 1982 to allow the roughly 1 million residents within 20km of the border permits valid for 60 months, for an unlimited number of crossings, each for a maximum of 100 hours (Cf. Vidmar 1994). Cross-border mobility and transfrontier employment (in the Trieste area in particular) should increase substantially once Slovenia begins to enjoy the right to free movement of persons in 2011. The delay in its implementation is due to (by most accounts alarmist) concerns among member-states (Austria and Germany being the most vociferously opposed) regarding an influx of lower-cost labour from Central and Eastern Europe. The EU’s subsequently delivered a horizontal response to all acceding states on the issue; despite Slovenia’s asking Italy for a bilateral derogation on the issue in 2001, Italy fell into line as (more-progressive) publics in Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Ireland agreed that free movement should be delayed. To the dismay of some and the elation of others, Slovenes will, for the time being, remain shoppers in Trieste rather citizens.

downplaying and dismantling of the Italo-Sloveno border due to the 2004 Slovenia's accession into the EU); the (dramatically belated) Italian adoption, in 2001, of a specific law on minority protection; and the increasing investments in cross-border cooperation made by the EU. Yet, the chronological path and its alleged cause-effect succession notwithstanding, such a linear narrative does hide several deceptive and contradictory elements, particularly for what directly concerns the minority condition.

### 3.1 *The border context*

The first level of changes concerns the sequence of well known "external" events which dramatically modified the whole border area: from the traumatic collapse of Yugoslavia, to the Slovenian independence in 1991, to its accession into the EU in 2004 and the forthcoming accession into the Schengen area in 2007.

Amidst the continuous evolving nature of the border situation, a real decisive turning point (at least for the specific situation of the Slovenophone minority living in FVG) was represented by the transition, in 1991, from the Yugoslavian Federation into the new Slovenian Republic. The formal recognition of Slovenia's independence by the Italian Government came only belatedly, in 1992, when Italy (in a way reluctantly) adopted the official European Union position. This delay can be interpreted as a symptom of persistent tensions, which in turn can be adduced to the heavy heritage of a past which has never been completely overcome (see Faro 2005). The incipient disintegration of Yugoslavia had 'allowed' several issues which had been formally settled in the Osimo Treaty to resurface: beyond the central issue of Slovenia's succession in treaties concluded between Italy and Yugoslavia, political actors in Italy specifically raised the issues of compensation for, and recuperation of, property abandoned by Italians in the Slovene littoral, as well as the level of protection afforded the Italoophone minority within Slovenia and in relationship to its counterpart in Croatia in the context of the two nations' secession from the federal Yugoslav state.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Slovenia's relationship with Italy 'was probably the single factor that could have destabilised the country internally and thwarted its European ambitions,' (Gow and Carmichael 2000:204) insofar as the Italian government presented 'essentially bilateral problems as European ones' and in doing so 'did not hesitate to put pressure on Slovenia to prove its "Europeanness"' in resolving them to its satisfaction (Šabič 2002:105). Amidst the rapidly evolving Italian political environment of the early 1990s, the *foibe*, as ever, thus resumed their role as 'an obsession in moments of national and political uncertainty,' (Pupo 1996:35)

As already mentioned above, the political and economic relations between Italy and Yugoslavia begun to normalise by the end of 1950s, leading to the beginning of regional and borderland re-integration. This process had directly concerned both the relations of the Slovenophone minority with the Slovenian Republic (within Yugoslavia) and the regime of cross-border movement, bilaterally ratified in 1955 by Italy and Yugoslavia. Actually, the shift from Yugoslavia to Slovenia altered that "normalised" situation. More precisely, it compelled the Slovene speaking minority to radically change an overall socio-economic system and an entire border economy. Although it was violently constrained within the Cold-war situation, the formal and informal system of relations between the Slovenophones

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<sup>9</sup> The post-secession division of Istria between Slovenia and Croatia led Italy to query the level of protection which would be afforded the overall Italoophone community in the region, given that that community would now be divided between two separate states. Italy eventually prepared a trilateral memorandum on the commitment of the two states to protect the Italoophone minority, which was meant to be signed just prior to Slovenia's diplomatic recognition. In order to obtain the necessary parliamentary approval, Slovenia appended a proposal for a bilateral treaty with Italy requesting equivalent, demonstrable commitment to the latter's Slovenophone community. Italy refused to sign the documents simultaneously, and thus the Slovene Foreign Minister was instructed not to sign the trilateral memorandum. Cf. Manzin 1997; Bratina 1997:146.

resident in FVG and Yugoslavia was nonetheless effective in allowing to develop a network of social and economic organisations (banks, industrial and trade organisations and cultural associations) materially supporting the life of minority (Sussi 2002, Marinig 2004).

As a matter of fact, the holding role played at that time by the Yugoslav Federation was a rather decisive one. After 1991, the small Slovenian Republic has not been able (and perhaps has been even unwilling) to provide minority with the same level of social, political and economic capitals. Although strictly connected with a more general crisis investing the Italian political and financial landscape (the so-called *Tangentopoli* scandal), the case of the bankrupt of the Slovenian minority's bank (*Creditni*), in 1994, provides a symptomatic evidence of such a transition. Several interviewees, though recognising the direct responsibility of the bank's management, denounced that neither the Italian nor the Slovenian Governments have done anything to avoid the financial collapse of the bank. In contrast they all nostalgically reckoned that had Yugoslavia still existed it could have played an important role in support of the bank. Due to the bankruptcy of *Creditni*, many Slovenophones lost their savings and the economical power of the Slovenophone community considered as a whole has consistently decreased. Moreover, many economic activities which had built their financial strength upon cross border relationship could not reclaim their credits.

Although only the part of the Slovenophone community linked to organisations such as SKGZ (which identified themselves with the politics of Tito's Yugoslavia and with the traditional Italian left-wing parties PCI and PSI) directly benefited from the strong alliance with Yugoslavia, their economic and political strength resulted in benefits for the community as a whole. After the fall of Yugoslavia the "yield position" that the minority could exploit as a privileged actor in the economic relations with the Yugoslav Federation (on import-export and the small-scale trade, for instance) has radically decreased. Nowadays, the privileged link of the Slovenophone community with 'the other side of the border' has progressively reduced to small-scale economic and social relations with Slovenia, and to the bilingual skills.

It is in such an ambivalent context that the accession of the Slovenian Republic into the EU in May 2004 has to be placed. The enlargement of the EU has obviously imposed a gradual and broader redefinition of the border context, both in terms of the relations between Italy and Slovenia and in terms of cross-border integration. Transborder movement of people is still limited. The long border with Slovenia can only be crossed in certain points. Between Sezana and Gorizia, for example, there are a number of minor border posts (second or third class border posts) which prior to Slovenia's accession could only be used by the people living along the border thanks to a special transit document (*lasciapassare*). The possibility to cross the border has now been increased – extending both the opening time of the local customs barriers, and abolishing the special transit documents for local residents (but only from the Italian side). However, the lack of individual free movement principle and the persistence of the Schengen frontier at the Italian border still limit transfrontier movements, and individual and commercial relations which have not sensibly increased after May 2004.

### 3.2 *The domestic context*

Although the Italian and Slovene minorities' protection within Italy and the former Yugoslavia were legally agreed in the 1975 Osimo Treaty (which at the same time fixed the border between the two states), the legal protection of the estimated 80-100,000 Slovenophones in Italy continues to evolve to this day, in a rather contradictory and uneven way. As a matter of fact, with the region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia being officially declared autonomous since 1967, due to its multicultural nature, the local minority policies seem far

from being homogeneous, and much of the interpretation and implementation of the various protection measures has been left at the discretion of the municipal level. As a result, rights to Slovene-language education, public address, and toponymical signage vary between the three provinces in which the Slovene-speaking minority lives. Indeed, the Italian parliament formally recognised the Slovenophones as a ‘national’ minority only in 2001 – whereas, the roughly 3,000 Italophones of the Slovene littoral have been already constitutionally protected at the time of the Yugoslavian federation, and obtained a full protection and a permanent representation as an autochthonous minority within the new Slovenian Republic.

As already mentioned, the minority-protection measures foreseen by the Osimo Treaty (concerning the right to Slovene-language education and press, to Slovenophone political, cultural, and recreational organizations, and a commitment to the community’s overall equitable socio-economic development) have been *de jure* (if not *de facto*) guaranteed only in the municipalities of Trieste and Gorizia, mainly as an heritage of their being subject to the Allied-coordinated post-WWII Peace Treaty, with a special jurisdiction maintained till 1954.

In other words, until 2001, Italy agreed only the strictly unavoidable in terms of minority protection: accepting the inherited existent situation without formally ratifying it, or, as in case of the province of Udine denying the very existence of any minority as such. This is particularly true for the Natisone Valley, where a radical process of forced italianisation and the violent repression of any Slovene trait within the community life (with the deployment of a special “anticommunist” secret service – *Gladio*) was carried out throughout the second half of the XXth century up to the mid 1980s.

Indeed, the ongoing Italian obstructionist, if not openly discriminatory and persecutory, attitude towards the Slovene minority has to be regarded as a direct effect of a deeply entrenched historical tension. And in fact, one should note that the legacy and the weight of the past still influences majority-minority political relations, at least in ideological or nationalistic terms - the end of the cold-war era notwithstanding. For the Slovenophone community considered as a whole, the widespread anti-fascist attitude and the memory of the Italian and Yugoslav partisans fighting together at the end of WWII are still some of the main factors of self-identification. For the most nationalistic faction of the Italphone majority, the degeneration of the Italo-Sloveno border into a genocide area at the end of WWII still fuels resentment against Slovenophones and it is used as a pretext to justify anti-Slav attitudes.

Paradoxically, recent Italian political developments, and particularly the transition of Italian political order into a bipolar system, ended up with maintaining (if not re-harshening at all) ideological divisions. The transition of the post-fascist party Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) into Alleanza Nazionale (the so called *Fiuggi* transition) and its participation into the right-wing coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi, has led to the re-harshening and the legitimisation of nationalistic claims which would have been previously unthinkable. Despite the official claims of pacification and normalisation (and of de-politicisation too), the changes imposed by the current political system have resulted in the political shift, for the first time in the regional post-war history, of the whole minority towards the centre-left coalition. This is a process which can be partially ascribed to the perception of an ongoing political and cultural hostility within the most openly nationalist faction of the centre-right coalition. Actually, the persistence, among the Italophone community, of more or less suppressed nationalistic claims is usually and instrumentally “revitalised” – particularly during the electoral campaigns – in order to defend the primacy of “Italian interests”, and it often degenerates in openly racist attitudes against the Slovenians, as well as in violent campaigns against the bilingual system.

The current political “unification” of the minority masks a persistent different attitude with regard to political and cultural identification. The defensive, nationalistic, and

often essentialistic strategy promoted by the ethnic party (the SSk) has been and is still contrasted by the larger left-wing minority faction. However, the two factions have substantially shared – and still share, though with different claims and levels of intensity – a common political struggle for the formal recognition of the minority’s status and protection – the main differences being determined by the different political options they respectively put forward within the centre-left, as well as by the different emphasis they pose upon identity issues and cultural or national belonging.

In more general terms, the path towards the Slovene minority formal recognition has proved far more complex if compared to the situation of other Italian linguistic minorities. Actually, an estimated 2.5 million people in Italy (4.5% of the whole population) belong to 14 nowadays officially acknowledged minority groups, making Italy home to more minorities than any other EU country. Considering the repressive and obstructive politics described above, and comparing it with the somehow “enlightened” treatment reserved to the Francophone population of the Valle d’Aosta, and particularly to the most complex case of the Germanophone population in South Tyrol (which obtained one of the most advanced schemes of cultural and political recognition at European level), Italy has historically demonstrated an uneven and somehow ambivalent attitude in minority protection policies. Such an unbalanced attitude is mainly due to the different “external” political conditions the minorities were related to, and, above all, to the ongoing absence of a general law on minority protection, which in turn implies that the (more or less) officially recognised minorities enjoy differing statuses – as the Slovene minority testifies.

The lack of a general constitutional framework concerning minorities has been formally (that is, mainly from above) filled in through a gradual process, whose first step is represented by the introduction, in 1999, of the law 482 concerning the recognition and the protection of Italian linguistic minorities, the final accomplishment (if not the real turning point) being marked by the adoption, in 2001, of the law 38 for the Slovenophone minority. The 2001 law formally ratified the Osimo Treaty concerning minority rights, updating it in compliance with the European standards and extending and harmonising minority rights to all three provinces (Trieste, Gorizia, and Udine). More precisely, the law officially recognised the Slovenophone presence in 32 communities in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, providing them with, among other rights, education in the Slovene language at the nursery, primary and lower- and upper-secondary levels, the right to address the local and provincial public administration in Slovene, bilingual identity cards, and bilingual toponymical signage.

The procedural mechanism of the law application operates through an apparent “from the bottom” logic, according to which each municipality can apply for the law protection once the application is approved by the 30% of the members of the municipal parliament. In other terms, the law will only apply in those municipalities of the province which specifically request it, via the provincial government final authorisation. As such, state funds destined for its fulfilment remain at present largely unassigned and/or unavailable to the province’s municipalities. More specifically, in the case of Trieste, the political obstacles in applying the law overall are in large part due to the political resistance posed by local provincial government, which has the final voice in ratifying the local application of the law to all six of the province’s municipalities.

Despite its partial and unbalanced application, the main effects determined by the law 38 basically concerned the *de jure* ratification (and arguably or potentially the *de facto* implementation) of minority’s linguistic rights, thus improving the bilingual system. The introduction of a bilingual system has been strongly claimed by both the two minority factions (and strongly opposed by the most nationalist factions within the Italian-speaking majority). The issues at stake particularly concern the introduction of the bilingual regime in public offices and documents, as well as in more practical situations such as the toponymical signage.

Despite the official claim, there is another and arguably far more decisive field where the notion of bilingual identity appears to become a rather partial and contradictory issue: the education and school system. Actually, the current education system is organised along the lines of a rigidly separated model, thus ratifying the parallel coexistence of entirely Italian and entirely Slovenian institutions such as kinder-gardens, and primary and secondary schools. The only exception being represented by the entirely bilingual elementary school in San Pietro al Natisone, which the law allowed to transform from a private institution into a public state-financed school. Indeed, at present, there are neither further plans to introduce Slovene-language schools in the province of Udine, nor to further expand the bilingual educational model adopted in San Pietro al Natisone (that is, courses organised half in Italian and half in Slovenian) elsewhere.

### *3.3 European integration and crossborder cooperation policy*

Europe's efforts to enhance the regional integration over the border area between FVG and Slovenia have been characterised by a succession of investments in cross-border cooperation and promotion of local development, starting from the beginning of the 1990s. Indeed, at the time of the first Interreg programme, in 1991, the overall border region was characterised by a general imbalance between the two national sides, due to the rather obvious longstanding effects of the political divide that the border implied. Yet, both the Italian and the Slovenian sides shared a rather deteriorated economic situation. In the case of the Slovenia, this was due to the compelling effects of the war and to the following complex conversion of its economy from a local/regional into a national one. In the case of the Italian side, this was due to the economic and social impact of the deindustrialization process undergone by Italian economy, particularly in the Trieste's area (a crisis which, in turn, resulted in the accession of the FVG region into the EU Objective 2 structural funds area).

Generally, all the European border regions which used to be crossed by a historical-political divide, as the one separating Italy and Yugoslavia used to be, presented analogous predicaments and impasses. And while, in some cases, regional integration can organically develop itself once cross-border flows become possible (whether for reasons of market expansion or due to the existence of interested economic actors on both sides of the border), in most cases it has to be 'jump-started' via regional-development policy interventions "from above" (Faro 2005). At a first glance, and for the reasons mentioned above, the specific situation the FVG/Slovenian border region at the time of the European intervention's start-up seems to correspond to the second case, requesting a specific push factor "from above". Yet, regional integration is a longstanding process. From this point of view, the transition from Yugoslavia to Slovenia seems to mark a rather ambivalent process: on the one side, it has sensibly downplayed the political weight of the border, promoting a new and less constrained level of crossborder relations; on the other side, it has dramatically modified the overall border economy and a pattern of economic relations with former Yugoslavia (which, above all, represented a big internal market compared with the new Slovenian one). For this reason, before recapitulating the cross border investments and the regional integration policies enacted by the EU, it is worth considering their antecedents.

Conventionally, the starting point of inter-regional planning collaboration related to the frontier dates back to the formation of *Trigon* by Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Austrian Carinthia, and Slovenia in 1965. This informal, sub-national arrangement became the *Alpe-Adria Working Community* in 1978, and gradually increased its number of member regions, technical capacities, and level of institutionalisation throughout the 1980s. Indeed, in its day, Alpe Adria provided one of the 'most compelling examples of the relative unimportance of the EC/EU as the essential impetus of transfrontier co-operation' (Anderson and Bort

2001:70). Decentralisation, increasing economic liberalisation, and rapprochement with its north-westerly neighbours within the Yugoslav federation during this decade – with substantial implications for Slovenia – further contributed to the circulation of people, publications, and ideas in the decades before Slovenia’s secession. Furthermore, the Italo-Slovene cooperation following the disastrous 1976 earthquake in Friuli allowed to sensibly improve both interregional and international relations. Particularly, the Yugoslavian (mainly via Slovenian decentralised offices) support and aids to the Italian population (offering technical capabilities in the reconstruction process, hosting children in Slovenian schools, and so on) contributed to reduce significantly the gulf of distrust existing between the population on the two sides of the border that the political divide had long determined, thus marking a turning point in the building up (indeed “from below”) of regional integration and cross-border relations.

Actually, the EU has sought to enhance cross-border development within and at the edges of the Union since 1991 both in order to increase the transactional efficiency of the internal market and as part of its commitment to balanced territorial development. The Italo-Slovene border was therefore one of the first targets of the Interreg programme and this was due to a number of reasons: the already mentioned Friuli-Venezia Giulia’s own regional developmental impasses and needs, the existing network of cross-border institutional cooperation in the region (e.g. the Alpe Adria regional-cooperation initiative), the priority given by the EU to political-economic stabilisation of the former Yugoslavia, as it began its wars of succession, as well as to post-communist Central and Eastern Europe generally, as well as the tragic history of this particular frontier and the EU’s desire to facilitate better relations across it.

The first Interreg programming period, which ended in 1995, was an experimental ‘familiarisation’ exercise for this new Community Initiative financed through the Structural Funds, and, as such, the initial programming period saw little actual cross-border impact or participation from the Slovenian side of the borderland. The EU’s Phare external assistance programme began operating in Slovenia in 1992, and a cross-border cooperation (CBC) component within it was formalised in 1994, though its interventions also took place entirely in the Slovene territory. The second phase of EU-led borderland integration, Interreg II Italy-Slovenia was finally approved in 1997. From the outset, the Interreg II programme was committed to enhance the cross-borderness of its actions well beyond the (very limited) extent achieved during the earlier Interreg programme; its intervention was thus aiming at three main objectives: upgrading the region local resources and environmental protection, improving the institutional cooperation and communication, and promoting entrepreneurial cooperation. The specific objective of the loosely coordinated Phare CBC Slovenia-Italy programme was stated simply as to assist ‘Phare areas bordering the EU to overcome their developmental problems’ whilst promoting cross-border co-operation ‘according to the Interreg programme principles,’ (Faro 2005). Interventions through Phare were particularly necessary on Slovenia’s border with Italy, as substantial delays to cross-border traffic were occurring due to outmoded border crossings, and were further exacerbated by the transport disruption brought about by the Yugoslav wars.

As Phare’s programming was annual (unlike multi-annual Interreg), further CBC programmes were begun each year beginning in 1995. In addition to land and maritime border crossings, early initiatives focused on cross-border or frontier environmental issues, which were coordinated insofar as possible with Interreg in Italy once the programme took off in 1997. However, one major consequence of the resolute focus on physical infrastructure was that person-to-person networks barely developed. Furthermore, two more obstacles militated against the intended results: first, Interreg II and Phare CBC began in different years, and that gap had a significant impact upon programming, institutional cooperation, local-partnership development, and project implementation generally, as well as

on the overall programme's ability to achieve its aims. Meanwhile, the legal and administrative discrepancies between Interreg and Phare had vast implications for cross-borderness in its interventions.

As already stressed in the State of the Art report, with regard to the difficulties that regional and national institutions face in achieving the ambitious objectives set in such initiatives, 'transfrontier institutions or associations lack real political weight and influence'. This is due to their 'lack of impact among the population in the frontier regions, political divisions, lack of resources, lack of a sense of transfrontier solidarity, constitutional legal? obstacles and reticence or indifference of central governments in promoting the above schemes,' (Anderson and Bort 2001:72). While this can be explained, partly by the lack of public awareness of the 'often mundane' achievements of transfrontier initiatives, it is often also the result of 'sharp differences of views between different levels of government in the same country', divergent national administrative and constitutional structures, and disparate levels of resources and budgetary powers accorded to regions trying to cooperate (Anderson and Bort 2001: 66, 72). All this applies very well to the Italian and Slovenian institutions during Interreg II.

While Phare CBC sought to 'match' Interreg II – thereby attempting to achieve transfrontier programming continuity where possible – the achievement of true cross-borderness faced several hurdles, reflecting the still highly unbalanced (both in economic and hierarchical terms) sharing of the programme from both sides of the border, and a persistent uneven level of national and regional organization. The latter constrained regional integration thus conditioning the overall programme implementation. For the 2000-2006 Interreg IIIA, the Italo-Slovene border has been defined as both a land and a maritime one; as far as Italy is concerned, it includes the provinces of Udine, Gorizia, and Trieste (region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia), as well as the province of Venice (region of the Veneto); with regard to Slovenia it includes the regions of Obalno-kraska and Goriska, as well as the municipality of Kranjska Gora. The 232 km-long land border connects 24 Italian municipalities with 13 Slovenian ones; a maritime border, meanwhile, connects Venice with Slovenia's Italo-Slovene municipalities. Moreover, the programme is the first of this kind to have a truly joint programming document – created and approved by regional actors and local experts from both sides of the border – as well as a joint steering committee. Nevertheless, several factors still potentially compromised institutional cooperation: the cross-border partnership 'continuing' into this programming period initially involved new actors in Friuli-Venezia Giulia. The Slovenian centralised system militated against its effectiveness in the border area, and the political environment in both Trieste municipality and the FVG Region (which at the time of the start-up of the program was still governed by a center-right coalition) encompass several nationalist factions which opposed any policy "potentially" threatening the internal "border regime". Furthermore, one major constraint acting against borderland cooperation in this region results from the fact that the Slovenes, along with the rest of the newly acceded states, will not enjoy free movement of workforce within the EU until 2010 – the different status among the two populations of the border probably being the strongest obstacle towards a thorough regional integration.

#### **4. Changing opportunities and constraints for minorities**

Given the developments outlined above, the scope of this section is to examine the extent to which the transformations impinging on the Italo-slovene border the domestic and regional politics, and the European integration have directly affected the condition of the Slovene minority living in Friuli Venezia Giulia. The analysis will focus on the impact of changing opportunities and constraints on the minority's socio-economic condition, political

representation and cultural mobilisation, and if and how the European integration process and EU policies have altered the Slovene minority's situation.

#### *4.1 Socio-economic condition*

The Slovenophones in Friuli Venezia Giulia could be hardly described as an economically disadvantaged group. There are neither figures nor indicators attesting a socio-economic discrimination or a sensibly different economic condition between the Slovenophone minority and the Italoophone majority. In this respect, it might be worth noting that actors' responses on the Slovenian minority side to specific questions about the Slovenophones' socio-economic condition emphasized the 'yield' position held by the minority in respect to border context rather than any specific socio-economic discrimination. In contrast, the discrimination perception is usually linked to the historical past. For instance, the expropriation of lands owned by the Slovenophones minority during the post WWII period intended to facilitate the urban and industrial development of Trieste still fuels resentment against the Italian Government. Nevertheless, as already mentioned above, the transition from Yugoslavia to Slovenia, while providing more fluid and free relations across the border (also developing a broader sense of proximity with the Slovenian reality), implied a redefinition of the whole "border economy" which minority could preferentially exploit in the past. Although bilingual skills and preferential relations with the 'other side of the border' are still reclaimed as important social and cultural capitals, the former support from Yugoslavia which the minority enjoyed in the past has not been replaced yet by the support of any other actor or alternative sets of factors. For example, concerning the small-scale trade and commercial relations on border area, Yugoslavia has for a long time supported Slovenophone minority' organizations in FVG securing them a sort of monopoly. They were guaranteed 1% of the value for all goods imported from Yugoslavia (which were all commercialised either through these organisations or through political parties). It is the case of the local, Trieste-based, slovenophone paper, the *Primorski dnevnik*, which has for a long time played the role of the privileged actor in managing the import-export of press and publishing between Italy and Yugoslavia in both the two languages. Nowadays, that kind of "monopolistic" position has vanished, and Slovenia seems no longer able to replace it.

Moreover, the uneven territorial dispersion of the minority in the three provinces of Trieste, Udine and Gorizia – which, in turn, imply different local economic and productive realities – makes it difficult to look at the Slovene minority as a uniform socio-economic whole. The minority's concentration within small municipalities and villages in the mountain area, e.g. the Natisone Valley and the Collio, or in rural settings, as in the case of the Carso, seems to suggest the picture of minority communities whose main interests and needs lie in the rural sector. And this is a sector that has recently gone through some extent of recovery. Some of the interviewees underlined the lack of structural infrastructures and facilities in the mountain and rural areas. However, within the context of the post-industrial transition that has been investing the whole Italian economy, the growing priority accorded to the valorization of the territorial, cultural and natural, resources, and the increasing investments in tourism and environment seem to address the Slovene community's current needs and concerns. There is no doubt that nowadays the Slovenophone minority largely perceives the community's link to the territory and the preservation of the natural environment as an economic potential resource. For this reason, EU investments in the border area, and particularly the funds which address the valorisation of the territory, have represented an important contribution to the economic life of Slovenophones who work in agriculture. In this regard, the progressive dismantling of the border has been an important factor of change, both for agricultural and tourist economic activities, as it allowed for an

integrated economy between the two sides of the border. This has been particularly important for areas such as the Collio and the Carso which, although had long been divided by a political border, are homogeneous areas which can now be valorized by an integrated approach.

The socio-economic differences between the Slovenophone minority and the Italian majority are sharper when the rural/urban divide is taken into consideration. On the other side, the impact of this rural urban dichotomy becomes more opaque when an inter-generational point of view and the urban context (where the majority of the Slovenophones live) are taken into account. This is not only due to the fall of population in mountain and rural areas. Instead it is also a consequence of the higher mobility of the younger generation, both in terms of labour mobility and in terms of cultural identification.

#### *4.2 Political representation*

The absence of a substantial socio-economic discrimination of the Slovenophone community does not entail the vanishing of what is a still persistent political and social “identification” of the minority ‘for itself’ and - though at a different degree - of the minority ‘in itself’. Yet, in the case of the Slovenophones in FVG this identification is neither uniform nor stable. As several studies on minority and diasporic experiences suggest, rather than a fixed and self-evident category, ‘minority’ seems to be a floating concept, suggesting an ongoing and always redefining dimension (Rahola 2000). Above all, minorities are not an internally homogeneous and impermeable category. Instead they are internally crisscrossed by opposite claims and tensions, divided between assimilative tendencies and the allegiance to what is perceived to be a “different” identity. This is particularly true in the case of the Slovenian-speaking community in Friuli Venezia Giulia. As already stressed above, the Slovene minority is far from being a compact whole. By contrast it appears a fragmented yet persistent presence, unified by a broader common cultural identification and by a common language – which, nonetheless, in the case of the dialect spoken by the “minority-majority” community of S. Pietro al Natisone, far differs from the Slovenian currently spoken by the minority communities in the provinces of Gorizia and Trieste .

When assessing the impact of the developments described above on the political representation of the Slovenophones in FVG, one should not ignore the well-structured internal organisation of the community from the post WWII period up to the 1990s. The Cold-war border had resulted in the community’s inner political division between ‘reds’ and ‘whites’. In fact, the internal border splitting the Slovenophone community was mainly an ideological divide between communists and anti-communists. The transition from Yugoslavia to the Slovenian Republic has been reshaping internal divisions and the end result still looks rather unpredictable. In general terms, the main effect of Slovenian independence on the Italian Slovenophone minority’s composition can be represented as a crisscrossed situation: the former closeness with the Yugoslav federation translates itself into the current distance with the Slovenian republic, and vice versa. From a broader political point of view, the new Slovenian Republic could potentially imply a closer and more direct cultural and/or political identification of the minority with a “mother-nation”. In a transnational perspective, the independence of Slovenian and its accession into the EU could represent a wider transnational area over which minority would stretch its network of socio-economic and political relations. Although these two options are not so clearly identified as alternatives, at the present the first one seems to prevail among Slovenophones who have been traditionally represented by the SSK. Catholic and liberal souls of the SSK notwithstanding, the political identity of the party is nowadays more and more being built upon ethnic and identity-defensive cleavages. On the contrary, a more “diasporic”

identification (strictly linked with the new and eventually transnational context of the European integration) characterises the left-oriented faction. As a matter of fact, the latter option appears to prevail within the whole Slovenophone community. And this is due either to the fact that the left-oriented faction represents the relative majority among the Slovenophones, and to the changing attitudes characterising the younger generations, which are more reluctant vis-à-vis defensive claims and exclusive and unique forms of belonging.

This very broad and schematic dichotomy should not conceal the fact that any ‘internal’ division within the Slovenophone community, as well as any ‘external’ boundary separating the minority from majority, are being continually negotiated and challenged, mirroring the changes in the overall political life in the local society.

### *4.3 Cultural mobilisation and needs*

In relation to the political changes mentioned in the former section, the position vis-à-vis the transition from Yugoslavia to Slovenia sensibly varies within the minority itself. On the one side, the renewed identification with a “mother nation” has been translated into rather alleged “nationalistic” claims, as they never accomplished secessionist demands or claims for independence. This situation coexists with a more critical position upheld by those among the Slovenophone minority who openly disagree with Slovenian internal and often nationalistic policies. Actually, neither a total identification nor a total refusal vis-à-vis the new Slovenian Republic represent the more widespread attitude among the community. Instead, the prevailing feeling seems to be oriented towards a progressive, though critical, openness toward a “post-national” identity. In more general terms, cultural mobilisation is probably the field where tensions and contradictions are more evident – and this is particularly true in the case of the bilingual policies.

Although claims for bilingualism are commonly endorsed by the whole Slovenophone community, the very notion of “bilingual identity” is a contested notion among Slovenophones themselves. While everyone agrees upon the necessity of extending bilingual toponymical signage, bilingual identity documents and the use of Slovenian in public offices, views vary with regard to the implementation of a truly bilingual regime in the school system. As a matter of fact the Slovenian schools in the Provinces of Gorizia and Trieste are not bilingual but ‘separated’ schools. Slovenian is the current teaching language in all the courses while Italian is thought as an optional foreign language. The same is true for Italian schools as Slovenian is thought as an optional foreign language starting from secondary schools. In other words, this school system does not provide mutual bilingual competences in the two languages for Slovenophones as well as for Italophones. The current school system is an heritage of the pre-WWII period which was maintained by the provisions of the London Memorandum of 1954, and it reproduces a strictly cultural division among the two linguistic communities.

This system has been implicitly ratified by the law 38 of 2001. In other terms (and in direct contrast to the Slovene littoral, where each resident of the bilingual communities is educated in both languages in order to ensure the equal civic participation of the minority, the current Italian legislation does not include a reciprocal provision mandating courses in Slovene language and culture in Italian schools: as a result, knowledge of the Slovenophone community and its history in Friuli-Venezia Giulia has generally remained confined within the community itself. And while the minority “red” faction does not seem to convincingly put its weight behind the improvement of a truly bilingual education system, such an option is strongly opposed by the more nationalistic faction embodied by ethnic minority party, the SSk, which defends the separate bilingual model and identifies in the monopoly of Slovenian and of the linguistic (and bilingual) competence a prerogative (and arguably a competitive

advantage) of the minority. In an only apparently paradoxical way – for it is a common predicament of majority/minority relations (Davis 2000) – the maintenance of the current separated regime and the opposition to a truly bilingual school system, finds the symmetric “convergence” of both the nationalistic factions within the Italophone majority and within the Slovenophone minority.

Nevertheless the struggle for the recognition of the Slovenian language has represented an important factor of change in the area of the *Slavia Friulana*. As mentioned above, in this areas Slovenophones were denied any specific cultural recognition. The use of the Slovenian dialect currently spoken in the private life was forbidden in public spaces. Since the 1970s, the cultural mobilisation of the local community has pursued two important goals. On the one side, the use of the local dialect was for the first time endorsed also as an instrument for identity empowerment, thus leading to the recognition of the local population as a linguistic minority. On the other side, the necessity to legitimise cultural an identity claims passed through the political struggle for the setting up of a bilingual school. The nursery and primary school of San Pietro al Natisone represent the only educational institution truly bilingual in the whole territory inhabited by Slovenophones. Although the school was officially founded in 1986, the struggle to set it up went on for a decade. Among the antecedents of the school, some experimental cultural exchanges which were spontaneously carried out by local actors in the 1970s are worth mentioning. For example, in September 1976 (after the earthquake which hit FVG) 128 kids from the Natisone valley were recovered in a Yugoslav school (in Istria) for 4 weeks and attended the local courses. Similar exchanges became more and more frequent in the following years, increasing the awareness of the local linguistic identity and leading to the quest for introduction of Slovenian in the local school system. Since the very beginning, the school of San Pietro al Natisone has been conceived as a bilingual rather than a separate Slovenian school: every subject is taught in Italian and Slovenian by teachers belonging to the two linguistic communities. Therefore, it address the educational needs of both the Slovenophone and the Italophoene community, as it is attested by the growing presence of Italophone children coming from families who deliberately choose the bilingual school instead of the local Italian school.

As a matter of fact the number of Italophone and mixed families opting for education in Slovenian language is growing even in the provinces of Gorizia and Trieste. According to a research conducted in 1996 and concerning the primary schools, the 58% of the children had both parents Slovenophone, the 35% had one Slovenophone parent and 75 had both Italophone parents. Moreover, the increase of mixed marriages (Sussi 2002) demonstrates a more and more fragile separation between the two linguistic communities. With regard to this phenomenon, the positions within the Slovenian minority vary to a great extent. On the one side, there are those who denounce a process of “silent assimilation”, mainly due to the attractive factor induced by a totally Italian surrounding environment. On the other side, there are those who do not consider a closer relation and even a “confusion” with the Italophone majority as a negative effect – i.e., as process able to endanger the Slovenophone identity.

Cultural mobilization should indeed be placed within the context of intergenerational change. The creative industry seems to be more and more oriented toward a continuous redefinition of cultural boundaries. Starting from the late 1970s and the 1980s there has been a growing number of cultural and political projects which explicitly challenged the very existence of a majority/minority dichotomised representation.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Among these experiments is worth mentioning the Kinoateljje, a cultural association for film-production (<http://www.nostrocine.co.uk/kinoateljje/site/html/php/index.php>). See below.

#### 4.4 European integration policies

Though the Interreg programme and its development priorities do not specifically target the borderland minority communities, some objectives within the programme have an implicit minority ‘focus’ (e.g., those geared toward cross-border cultural and vocational cooperation, or toward economic development at the border itself between similar linguistic communities), and minority organisations are among the many eligible to apply with projects for funding. As a matter of fact, several projects financed by Interreg programme have directly or indirectly addressed minority communities. The majority among these were mainly focused in cultural cross-border initiatives. The actual impact in fostering mutual knowledge from both sides of the border varies significantly. In some cases Interreg projects have simply ratified the already existing network of relations without inducing any real change in minority’s opportunities. In other cases, they have been able to address real local needs and to develop the existing cross border relations, as well as to create new opportunities. Actually, the main risk perceived by local actors is that the projects simply support formal and “decorative” initiatives, mainly promoted ‘from above’ and aimed at spending the funds. Nevertheless, when the projects have been based upon locally embedded actors and public institution, directly addressing economic, cultural or environmental real needs, they have proved quite successful both in engaging local communities and in improving crossborder integration.

Among public and institutional actors which have been active beneficiaries of EU’s programs and funds, the “*Comunità Montane*” should be mentioned. The *Comunità montane* are associations of municipalities intended to promote the valorization of the local territory. While the three different *Comunità Montane* of the Natisone, Collio and Torre valleys have now been unified into a sole institution, they have played an important role in promoting cross border cooperation since the early 1990s.

In view of the forthcoming Slovenia’s accession into the Schengen area in 2007, and the following shifting of the EU external border to the frontier between Slovenia and Croatia, the last European programming concerning the overall investments and funds on border regions identifies Slovenia as a privileged area, conferring it the eligibility in directly managing EU funds. This represents a potential competitive advantage for the Slovenophone minority in Italy, due to its preferential relations with Slovenia and its bilingual competences. Yet, the regional economy still registers a separate economic regime, to the extent that the majority’s firms are strictly Italophone and minority’s firms are strictly Slovenophone, without any mixed experience. In other terms, whereas the political domain is necessarily mixed, the economic one is not. This separation is in turn reflected into a different (and somehow asymmetrical) developmental perspective. Given the small scale of the Slovenian internal market, the majority of entrepreneurial activities hold preferential trade and economic relations with Croatia and Serbia, as well as with other, more “eastern” countries. On the contrary, Slovenophone economic actors - usually smaller - do not have enough strength to take advantage of this long-term perspective.

#### 5. Local actors responses and perceptions

The complexity of the situations and the transformations as described above deeply influences actors’ perceptions and responses.

When considered as a whole, the Slovenophone community in FVG is characterized by a high degree of political awareness and mobilization and by a strong community’s solidarity. Socio-political awareness and the long-established civil society’s structure are

among the main factors which influence actors' responses. Different political, economic and cultural demands are not understandable only in terms of majority/minority relations framed by ethnic-national differences. Instead, they depend on specific territorial condition and historical background, as well as on respondents' political preferences.

Community solidarity is often perceived as an instrument to achieve socio economic integration rather than a "defensive" position induced by the necessity of the community's cultural 'survival'. It is, therefore, considered more as a "material" or political strategy than as a cultural assumption. Among actors' responses, a feeling of ethno-national belonging to be secured and pursued as such is underlined only by few interviewees: in most of the cases by members of the community of the older generation close to the SSk (R. 9 and R. 15). For example, political leaders of the SSk strongly emphasised that the future of ethnic communities cannot nowadays be secured or looked after through traditional political parties which define themselves according to 'right' and 'left' divisions. While SSk had previously been characterized by an anti-communist liberal-catholic identification, after the fall of Yugoslavia it has increasingly endorsed a defensive identity-centred strategy. Nevertheless, when directly questioned on the matter, most respondents did not see any need to justify the presence of ethnic parties or their position or their political programmes. The following answer is, in a way, emblematic: «ethnic parties are concerned with minority's issues, in the same way that "green" parties are concerned with environmental issues» (R. 9).

However, this position is only a minoritarian one among Slovenophones. As a matter of fact, the assumption of a given 'ethnic line' as the crucial factor in defining minority/minority relations is highly disputed within the minority itself, to the extent that the internal solidarity among the Slovenophone community is more linked with political and linguistic factors - thus sensibly downplaying the ethnic one. The majority of the respondents don't look at ethnic belonging as the main factor for their political and social identification. The possibility to freely express cultural belonging and needs is rather reclaimed as a matter of civil rights and unconditioned choice. For example, one respondent defines national belonging «as a matter of preferential choice which should be granted to every citizen» relying his position on an openly political anti-nationalistic ground (R. 10). While these two positions represent the two polarities of a dividing boundary within the minority itself, a unifying element among Slovenophones is the reaction against a persistent and often reifying identification of the minority 'from the outside' (i.e. from the Italophone majority). This framework of analysis becomes more complex when it is observed from an inter-generational point of view. Younger generations tend to contest both internal divisions within minority itself and the very existence of a clear boundary in majority/minority relations (R. 1, R. 14, R. 16, R. 22, R. 24). For example, one of the respondents refers to the experience of his own generation as the experience of "border-people" which could not be ascribed to any fixed communities «a generation whose composition has been differential and dynamic» and which is still unrepresented by existing political and civil society's institutions (R. 16).

These different identity perceptions are mainly reflected in different cultural demands and priorities. For example the different approaches to bilingual identity have not only led to interesting projects in the school system, but also in the wider field of creative industry. In this respect it is worth mentioning the experience of the Kinoateljje: a cultural association for film-production (<http://www.nostrocine.co.uk/kinoateljje/site/html/php/index.php>) created in the 1970s in Gorizia. Besides an artistic activity, Kinoateljje has been an important political experiment to the extent that it has searched for an alternative identity. In the words of one of its founders «the cinema as a linguistically neutral kind of art is a powerful instrument for this purpose. Kinoateljje was an experiment of "transborder-cinema" which was able to challenge established dichotomised identities and to reclaim a "border" identity which could not be ascribed to any fixed-national belonging» (R. 16). Thanks to its direct link to

Slovenian cultural institutions, in the years Kinoateljje has also been a beneficiary of Interreg funds (R.16 and R. 22).

Although different perspectives characterize interviewees' responses, the belonging to the Slovenophone community is widely perceived as a resource and an opportunity rather than an undermining constraint. Many respondents stressed the very presence of the minority as an element of richness for the territorial development, conceiving it as «a bridge-factor» (R. 2, R. 3, R. 10) among the two sides of the border.

With regard to minority's economic demands, they are mainly linked to the territorial condition instead of being determined by their minority status. This is especially true when considering mountain and rural areas. This perception is shared by both economic and political minority's actors. For example the current president of the Comunità Montana stressed that the socio-economic problems of the area «cannot be reduced to a “national” question. They are problems connected to the conditions of the territory and involve the local population as a whole» (R. 12). Moreover, in many actors' perception the valorization of the local territories is an issue which cannot be constrained within geo-political borders. Many respondents claimed that administrative borders and constraints still limit the possibility of an integrated management of the territory (R. 12 and R. 2). By contrast, the territory is perceived as «the natural link with our Slovenian neighbours and the usual field of interchange» (R. 2). Consistently, in many actors' perception EU funds and programmes are positively evaluated to the extent that they meet the improvement and the integrated valorization of cultural and natural territorial resources. Among the funded Interreg projects respondents mention: “Conosci il Carso”, a project with a cultural focus aimed at spreading and deepening the knowledge of the area; “Fuoco senza confini” a project aimed at the transborder cooperation in preventing fires; and a further project aimed at the integration of “best practices” of territorial management.

Among economic demands linked to the valorisation of the territory, it is worth mentioning two ambitious projects which have not been developed yet: the creation of a transborder natural park in the Carso area, and the creation of a unified transborder consortium for the wine production in the Collio area (extending the CGOD appellation). Due to the fact that the main part of the Slovenophone minority is concentrated in rural and mountain areas, issues concerning the valorization of territorial resources are perceived as demands which directly relate to minority needs (R. 19). Actually, the lands of the area are mainly owned by Slovenophones.

The different territorial development of FVG has also consequences for the different distribution and use of EU structural funds. For example, the province of Pordenone has only recently been included by the Region within the areas eligible for Interreg. The former exclusion has been highly contested by the commerce chambers of FVG. The existence of unexpected cooperation links and economic relations between the area of Pordenone and some Slovenian areas has been underlined by one of the interviewees (R. 20).

With regard to the perception of Europe, overall Slovenophones show a greater awareness of the complexity of the European integration and enlargement process when compared with Italians. A recurrent issue in the actors' responses is “the border” issue. Free circulation is widely perceived as the very - and still to be achieved - turning point in the cross border relations between Slovenia and FVG, as well as between the Balkans and Europe. Transborder mobility is felt as an essential need among the Slovenophone minority because many people maintain strong links with the other side of the border. Some of the respondents underline the direct impact of the border on everyday life: «people living along the border go to the theatre and to the library in Sezana, but they cannot come back after 8pm due to a number of second and third class border posts between Sezana and Gorizia which are open only few hours per day» (R. 3). Moreover, other respondents have stressed more general transborder relations: such as those implied by the choice of many young

Slovenophones to attend the University in Ljubljana. Since in FVG there are not Universities which provide courses in Slovenian language, the University of Ljubljana has guaranteed a reserved quota of placements to Slovenophones living in FVG.

The persistence of the border between Slovenia and Italy is denounced as a constraint with regard to both social and economic activities. Specifically referring to the Slovenia's accession to the EU, almost the totality of the Slovenophones respondents perceives it as an unaccomplished process in so far the right to free circulation and establishment is not guaranteed to the Slovenian workers. One of the recurrent remark made by respondents is that "while Slovenia have entered EU, Slovenians have not" Moreover economic actors also denounce the strict implementation of the new Schengen border between Slovenia and Croatia arguing that «the Schengen agreements hve brought benefits inside Europe but has created a barriers toward the outside» (R. 12).

In general terms, positive evaluation and expectations about Europe are mostly linked to the 'promise' of freedom of movement; to anti-nationalistic developments; to legislative and administrative regulations protecting minorities' rights. Negative evaluations are linked to the lack of satisfaction in meeting the expectation just mentioned; to complex administrative regulation felt as a limit to free economic development; to the "just in time" nature of EU funds and programmes instead of long term policies; to the lack of social and political cohesion.

The findings of the empirical research show how micro-communities linguistically homogeneous call into question the identification of majority/minority relations according to ethnic, national and linguistic belonging. This dichotomised representation is challenged by an increasing quota of both Slovenophones and Italophones. Majority's attitude toward minority is, in some cases, still influenced by the historical controversial past, in other cases is fuelled by indifference and lack of knowledge. Nevertheless, as in the case of the minority even the majority cannot be depicted as an homogeneous monolithic whole. Only one among the Italophone respondents had openly denied the importance of minority's issues «affirming that after fifty years it does not make sense to speak about a Slovenian minority in FVG as Slovenophones are Italian citizens». He added that «the minorities' discourse is instrumentally aimed at the maintenance of a privileged and defensive position of Slovenophone in FVG: a position which does not facilitate the social integration of the population as a whole» (R. 20).

Although this position is paradigmatic of a still persistent assimilatory attitude, the majority of Italophone respondents have shown a deep awareness of the political complexity of the minority issue. Some of the respondents call into question the majority-minority dichotomy emphasising a dynamic process of social and identity construction. The following quote which refers to the situation of Trieste is characteristic of similar positions «It is not a matter of an Italian majority and a Slovenian minority, but rather of many minorities living in the same town. Even the Italian young generations are a minority of older people, and in town there are about 7,000 "invisible" Serbs» (R. 8). An analogous position is actually endorsed also by Slovenophone respondents' as witnessed by the reply of a public officer of a small municipality who describes «the "natural integration" process as a be-directional process which also regards the integration of the Italians in the considered territory» (R. 4).

In more general terms, the self perception of both Italophone and Slovenophone respondents in identifying their position as Italian citizens is unproblematic. The situation becomes obviously more complex when questions are posed in terms of national belonging. Slovenophones' responses vary from a self-perception based upon a clear distinction between citizenship and nationality, to more complex answers. As a matter of fact the very distinction between citizenship and national belonging still reflects the identification of a kin-State as a "mother nation". Only few of the respondents clearly identify the minoritarian belonging in national Slovenian terms defining themselves as Italian citizens with Slovenian

nationality (R. 9 and R.15). In contrast, the majority among them either emphasizes the belonging to a linguistic community rather than a national one, as testified by the following answer: «My starting point is a principle which also the Italian constitution recognised. A principle of democracy according to which everyone has the right to belong to the linguistic group and culture he or she decides to belong to. I do not like to use the term “ethnic” group. It is a linguistic group.» (R. 10). In certain cases the identification of the former Yugoslavia as a “non-national kin state” is accompanied by a strong anti-nationalistic feeling reclaimed in political terms (R. 2, R. 3, R. 10). In other cases, the self-perception is more dynamically articulated reclaiming “the right not to belong” to any given identity (R.1 and R. 11)

## **6. European integration, ethnic-national identity, territory**

The Slovenophones population living in FVG cannot be depicted as an homogeneous and monolithic community. Socio-economic conditions, as well as identity perceptions, vary considerably when historical backgrounds, political orientations, specific territorial conditions and inter-generational distinctions are taken into account. During the last 20 years opportunities and constraints for the Slovenophone population in FVG have undergone profound changes. The main element of such transformation coincides with the progressive downplaying of a border which, for almost 50 years, used to be a political watershed. This has exerted profound effects within the community life. Yet, referring the whole series of transformations involving the minority’s political and social conditions to the well evident political changes which have invested the Italo-Slovene border would end up in a reductive and too deterministic option. Changes have not been produced by a single event, but rather by the interaction of different factors and sets of actors.

The impact of European integration on ethnic minority’s and national majority’s mobilization at the Italo-Slovene borders has indeed to be placed in a wider context. With reference to the major changes which have occurred since the 1990s, the European integration process has definitely been among the key factors for the approval of a specific law protecting the Slovenophone minority in 2001. In fact, in view of the Slovenia’s accession to the EU, it would have been impossible for Italy to justify the persistence of this gap in its legislation. Yet, not even the approval of the law 38 in 2001 should be reduced to a “from above” concession, as it followed decades of struggles for the recognition of civic and linguistic rights.

During the post WWII period the Cold-war border was reflected within the Slovenophone minority itself, and paradoxically the existence of a “solid” border allowed the minority to organise itself in an ideologically, politically and socially efficient way, both politically and economically. The fall of Yugoslavia has to be considered as a main factor of change in minority’s condition. On a more general level, it implied an uncertain transition from a structured “border economy” into a more fluid and less guaranteed situation. The decisive role played by Yugoslavia in supporting minority’s material condition has not been replaced by the new independent Slovenia. Nevertheless, the downplaying of the Iron Curtain allowed to normalise transborder relations which had tragically affected the everyday life of Slovenophones. Moreover, starting from the 1970s and the 1980s, changes in terms of minority constraints and opportunities have been directly determined by the increasing social and political mobilisation of the Slovenophone actors. This is particularly true in specific areas such as the *Slavia Friulana*, where the mobilization process allowed to bring to the fore the very existence of a Slovenophone population which had been denied its rights and violently oppressed for almost one century. Nonetheless, an high level of political awareness and social activeness has to be acknowledged as a specific trait characterizing the whole Slovenophone community in FVG. The network of transborder relations which

Slovenophones have built starting since the mid 1950s further substantiates the degree of internal political mobilization and self-organization.

In order to assess the impact of EU integration process and regional policies on minority conditions all the above mentioned factors have to be taken into account. As a matter of fact, structural funds promoting cross border cooperation and regional integration have improved minority's opportunities to the extent that they have met or fostered minority's mobilization, implementing cultural initiatives, and, eventually, enhancing the relations with the "twin community" on the Slovene side of the border. In other words, in the case of the Italo-Slovene border the integration process which directly concerns the Slovenophone population should be conceived as a bottom-up process rather than a from-above ruled one. As a matter of fact, Slovenophones have always been aware of their 'border condition' implementing an high attitude in considering problems and opportunities in a wider and trans-border spatial dimension.

In the case of the Italo-Slovene border, the main factor upon which majority/minority relations and mutual identification processes have been built is the border itself. It is upon the political and historical redefinition of the border that majority-minority relations have been redefined also in cultural and social terms. Nonetheless neither the dismantling of the Iron Curtain, neither the current European integration process have been perceived as processes which have undermined the border for good. As already underlined above, the Slovenophone community in FVG testifies to a framework of analysis according to which 'minority' is a floating concept, rather than a fixed and self-evident category. Material conditions which could define Slovenophone minority in itself - such as the socio-economic conditions - are neither homogeneous nor perceived as crucial factors of self-identification by the minority for itself. Cultural and social demands – such as bilingual identity and competences - only partially overlaps with identity claims. Moreover, as testified by many quotations referred to in the previous section, the very self-perception of Slovenophones' condition as a 'minoritarian' condition - and therefore disadvantaged – is a highly contested perception.

What is at stake in the redefinition of minority's interest and identity perceptions has been synthetically described by one of the respondents in the following terms: «It is not a question of searching for identity in a univocal way. You can feel to be part of both the Slovenian and the Italian culture or, rather, you can perceive yourself as something different from both the two, as something in between and new» (R.11). This does not undermine the legitimacy of specific claims such as the use Slovenian language in the public life. Rather it redefines the grounds upon which identity claims are endorsed. Assimilation and defensive policies are the two horns of dichotomised strategies which, in turn, deny legitimacy to minority's claims or force them within a reified and essential 'difference'. In contrast, the condition of Slovenophones in FVG seems to correspond more to the dynamic situation described in the words quoted above.

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**List of interviews:**

<b>Respondent 1</b> Development/Political representative – minority Provincial assessor – Gorizia -Male Interviewer Rigo/Rahola Gorizia, December 2005
<b>Respondent 2</b> Political representative – minority Mayor of Sgonico - Male Interviewer Rigo/Rahola Sgonico, December 2005
<b>Respondent 3</b> Political representative – minority Regional Councilor - Female Interviewer Rigo/Rahola Trieste, December 2005
<b>Respondent 4</b> Political representative – minority Municipal assessor - Male Interviewer Rigo/Rahola Sgonico, December 2005
<b>Respondent 5</b> Political representative – minority Mayor of S. Pietro al Natisone - Male Interviewer Rigo/Rahola S. Pietro al Natisone, December 2005
<b>Respondent 6</b> Political representative – minority Regional Councilor - Male Interviewer Rigo/Rahola Trieste, January 2006
<b>Respondent 7</b> Political representative – majority Mayor of Duino Aurisina - Male Interviewer Rigo/Rahola Duino, December 2005
<b>Respondent 8</b> Political representative – majority Regional Councilor - male Interviewer Rigo/Rahola Trieste, January 2006
<b>Respondent 9</b> Community leader– minority Party’s leader - male Interviewer Rigo/Rahola Trieste, December 2005
<b>Respondent 10</b> Community leader– minority Former mayor - male Interviewer Rigo/Rahola

S. Pietro al Natisone, December 2005
<p><b>Respondent 11</b>  Community leader– minority  School director/political activist - female  Interviewer Rigo/Rahola  December 2005</p>
<p><b>Respondent 12</b>  Community leader– minority  President of Comunità Montana - male  Interviewer Rigo/Rahola  Gorizia, December 2005</p>
<p><b>Respondent 13</b>  Community leader– minority  Former mayor- female  Interviewer Rigo/Rahola  S. Pietro al Natisone, January 2005</p>
<p><b>Respondent 14</b>  Community leader– minority  Political activist - male  Interviewer Rigo/Rahola  Trieste, January 2005</p>
<p><b>Respondent 15</b>  Civil society – minority  Journalist - male  Interviewer Rigo/Rahola  Gorizia, December 2005</p>
<p><b>Respondent 16</b>  Civil society – minority  Documentary maker -male  Interviewer Rigo/Rahola  Gorizia, December 2005</p>
<p><b>Respondent 17</b>  Civil society – minority  Journalist - male  Interviewer Rigo/Rahola  Cividale del Friuli, January 2006</p>
<p><b>Respondent 18</b>  Business – minority  Industrial sector - female  Interviewer Rigo/Rahola  San Dorligo della Valle, January 2006</p>
<p><b>Respondent 19</b>  Business – minority  President of Slovenophone farmers - male  Interviewer Rigo/Rahola  Trieste, January 2006</p>
<p><b>Respondent 20</b>  Business – majority  Industrial sector - female  Interviewer Rigo/Rahola  Trieste, January 2006</p>

<p><b>Respondent 21</b>  Business – majority  Commerce chamber - male  Interviewer Rigo/Rahola  Trieste, January 2006</p>
<p><b>Respondent 22</b>  Main project beneficiaries– minority  Creative industry - male  Interviewer Rigo/Rahola  Trieste, January 2006</p>
<p><b>Respondent 23</b>  Main project beneficiaries– minority  Research institute - male  Interviewer Rigo/Rahola  Trieste, January 2006</p>
<p><b>Respondent 24</b>  Main project beneficiaries– minority  Project consultancy - male  Interviewer Rigo/Rahola  Trieste, January 2006</p>
<p><b>Respondent 25</b>  Political representative – minority  Regional councillor - female  Interviewer Rigo/Rahola  Trieste, January 2006</p>
<p><b>Respondent 26</b>  Political representative – majority  Mayor of Gorizia - Male  Interviewer Faro  Gorizia, June 2004</p>
<p><b>Respondent 27</b>  Political representative – majority  Regional Commissioner - Male  Interviewer Faro  Udine, June 2004</p>
<p><b>Respondent 28</b>  Political representative – minority  Regional councillor – Male  Interviewer Faro/Sabec  Trieste, October 2005</p>
<p><b>Respondent 29</b>  Community leader – minority  Party’s leader – Male  Interviewer Faro  Gorizia, June 2004</p>
<p><b>Respondent 30</b>  Civil society – minority  Journalist – Male  Interviewer Faro  Ljubljana, October 2005</p>

**Respondent 31**

Development public official – majority  
Interreg initiative - Male  
Interviewer Faro  
Trieste, May 2002

**Respondent 32**

Development public official – majority  
Interreg initiative - female  
Interviewer Faro  
Trieste, May 2002

**Respondent 33**

Development public official – minority  
Interreg initiative - female  
Interviewer Faro  
Trieste, May 2002